

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : May 5th, 2019
“Third Sunday of Easter”

EASTER 3, 5 MAY 2019

I received an email the other day which went like this:

“Dear Friend, I have a Mutual Business Project that would be beneficial to you. I only have two questions to ask of you if you are interested.

1. Can you handle this project? 2. Can I give you this trust?

Please note that the deal requires high level of maturity, honesty and secrecy. This will involve moving some money from my office on trust to your bank account. Please note that I will do everything to make sure that the money is moved as a purely legitimate fund, so you will not be exposed to any risk.

I request your full co-operation. I will give you details and procedure when I receive your reply to this email along with the details of your bank account. To commence this transaction, I require you to immediately indicate your interest by a return reply. I will be waiting for your response in a timely manner.”

Of course you will have spotted this scam as quickly as I did. But I **was** struck by the two questions posed: Can you handle this project? Can I give you this trust? It had distinct echoes of what Jesus was asking of Peter in his post-Easter appearance to the disciples as they patiently fished on the lake. Was Peter big and strong enough to take on this project? Could he be trusted?

The image of fishing is a good one for the disciples of Christ, both in 1st century Galilee and in 21st century Wimbledon. One of my younger godsons regularly goes fishing with his Dad and he was solemnly telling me that going out into the deepest, roughest water and trying to snare the biggest fish is not the best way to fish – it is much more appropriate to cast the line into a manageable stretch of water where he would not be out of his depth and where he can patiently and quietly still fish in an effective way. That image might be helpful for each of us as we try our own fishing amongst those around us who we are trying to catch for Christ.

And it is, of course, not just fishing which requires a patient, careful hand. If you garden, you know that sowing, planting takes time and patience and cannot be rushed. Nurturing and bringing up children. Keeping friendships and family relationships in good order. Planning a holiday. Thoroughly cleaning a house. Decorating. Doing some DIY work. So much in life needs time and patience. So much cannot easily be hurried.

In a similar way, God is not to be rushed. Faith/belief is a slow growing seed in many people. In the readings today, we read of the conversion of Paul, that famous account, when God literally grabbed Paul and changed him – but I suspect that the seed had actually been slowly growing inside Paul. In our Gospel reading we have those first disciples, so wonderfully human and well-meaning and bumbling, going back to the safe place they came from as a natural reaction to the turmoil and trauma of the present post Easter situation. As Jesus sets up his breakfast camp on the beach, he gives those friends he loves the opportunity to discover him, recognise him and recommit themselves to his way of living. Gently and deliberately, Jesus leads Peter to undo his denials and face the risky consequences of his commitment in a more realistic way. Can you handle this project? Can I give you this trust? There is maturity about Peter's commitment now, quite different from his previous enthusiastic claim that he would never forsake his Master. This commitment is quieter and made with more self-knowledge. Peter is growing up.

We too need to grow and mature in our faith and our belief. We all need to recommit ourselves to be fishers of human beings – casting our net, our line in a gentle and quiet way towards those who we would hope might take a bite of the good news which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple means following, learning, growing. One way in which that can happen for many is by becoming a member of the Church, which in the Church of England is by baptism. So it is wonderful to be here this morning with Luke and Katy and George for the baptism of Ted. Who knows how he will grow up and what he will grow into? That is in God's hands and it is to God that we commit him by baptism, supported as he is by family and friends.

It takes all sorts to build a Church: theologians and pastors, people of reflection and people of action. In his Gospel, John the theologian tells the story of the commissioning of Peter the pastor. There are no hoops through which Jesus makes Peter jump, but there is a very real test of love and friendship, the hallmarks of good theology and pastoral care.

Whenever Jesus meets us and challenges us, we become his witnesses and are drawn into a commission, which carries great responsibility. Those who have not met Jesus yet will judge him by the way we, the disciples of today, patiently behave and quietly speak. God asks of us: Can you handle this project? Can I give you this trust? May we say 'yes' and then try our best never to let him down?